1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
FF38 Katab FF38

"Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "Na mi kiang a zangat se zangat (indecent). Refrain: "Ei, ee."

The indecency of the songs sung at the public festivals is in striking contrast to the rules of decorum which govern the ordinary private life. This is not characteristic of the Katab, but may be said to be general of all Negro society. To brothers-in-law, for example, any jokes about sexual intercourse would, in the ordinary course, be taboo and wholly impossible. A man will bow down in humble subjection to his parents-in-law and avoid them on all possible occasions. But on the occasion of public festivals all the ordinary rules of private life are waived, and there is a saturnalia which permits a father-in-law to dance round in the same circle as his daughter-in-law, singing songs referring in the main to sexual matters. It is repugnant to any native to repeat in cold blood the words of these songs to a European, and it would be equally repugnant to him to use them at any other time than on the occasion of the public festival when, as of old among the Romans, free expression is given to the pent-up feelings. (In this connection we may instance cases where during public festivals, e.g. among the Gwari, it is permissible to abuse the Chief without fear of retaliation for all actions during the year which were regarded as unjust and tyrannical.) An *obwai* festival is also held at harvest, and a month before the feast his voice is heard warning the people to make preparations and desist from idle disputes.

There are among the Katab no elaborate rites of initiation into the cult of *obwai*. Children are taken to his hut at an early age (4–8), warned to be obedient to their parents and given food. The short ceremony is concluded by a form of baptism in a stream, the smearing of the boys' heads with mahogany oil, and a feast in the village. It may be of interest to mention here the part that the *obwai* plays among the neighbouring Jaba tribe in the matter of initiation. These initiation rites among the Jaba have no connection with circumcision. They are performed when the lad is between 9 and 11 years of age. Among the Jaba, the *obwai* is known as the *Ku*[1] and the initiation rites are known as *woroku*. A noteworthy feature is that the lad is initiated not by his father, but by his maternal uncle. The father has no say in the matter. The lad goes to his maternal uncle's house, and the uncle provides the preliminary fee of one chicken. He

[1] This is a Jukun and apparently also an Ancient Egyptian term. See Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 263.

2: Gunn E-4 (no date) 1956 FF38 Katab FF38
Kagoro

769 survival after death."[91] It seems clear from Smith's account that the Kagoro *obwai* cult " does not command awe among initiated males " at the present time, but he leaves some doubt as to the effectiveness of the cult among the uninitiated, particularly the women, commenting only that it " has lost some of its functions."[92] Apart from spring memorial rites the ancestral cult appears to be associated with none of the rituals of the annual cycle—planting, harvesting, or hunting.[93]

The extent to which belief in the supernatural constitutes a basis for, or at least an element of, the aforementioned rituals of the annual cycle is by no means clear from Smith's accounts of them, already referred to.[94] Tremearne, too, fails to make the point clear in describing " harvest rites."

769 Of hunting rites Temple says only that ancestral spirits are consulted in the sacred grove. *Akanyam*, described by Smith as ritualized beer drinking by
224 members of a lineage at the lineage shrine (*sshwo*), appears to be associated primarily with hunting, but it is not clear whether this rite follows each hunt, or simply terminates the hunting (=dry) season. Neither is the religious, as contrasted with the social, basis of the rite entirely clear, though Smith calls it a " ritual of purification," and says that it marks the end of the period during which the hunter is in danger from his quarry's dead spirit.[95]

614 Judging from Meek's evidence, the *kwai* (clans) are totemic units, that is, respect particular animal species: he reports, however, that clans recognizing a common origin (that is, localized segments of a *bin*) sometimes do, and sometimes do not, recognize the same species as their emblem.

794 Smith gives an interesting account of the *imbhweh* cult, which during its brief career rivalled the *obwai* cult, and threatened to displace the budding chieftaincy
668 as a comprehensive institution, so that (in 1934) the Administration felt bound to outlaw it. In general outline *imbhweh* closely resembles *obwai*; it was essentially a male secret society with masked dancers and initiation, and it imposed a certain discipline on the community through floggings and ritualistic fines of goats and beer.
[731] According to Smith, the rise of *imbhweh* was incident to the disastrous locust invasion and subsequent famine of *c.* 1930, and to the activities of a new chief appointed about this time, a ruthless man, who converted the N.A. police into a
[661] personal instrument and had people whipped, fined, or imprisoned at will. *Imbhweh's* chief claim was to the control of locusts; accordingly the shrine and ritual of the cult was established in each village, under the headship of the *titu imbhweh*. Everyone was required to attend the nightly dances at the shrine, to
[786] bring beer, goats, chickens, and dogs as tribute. Women were ordered to sleep with nominees, and premarital licence, a thing foreign to Kagoro custom, was ordered. *Imbhweh* was also instrumental in punishing theft, which had increased during the period of locust infestation. According to Smith, the great mass of the people were caught between these two opposing forces struggling for power,

[91] How this accords with Smith's assertion that " in former days . . . ritual assistance . . . was sought from [their father and father's brother] either in their lifetime by small gifts of beer or after their death," is not clear, unless it be that a generation of successful mission activity has wrought changes in Kagoro religious belief.

[92] Smith implies that even the residual core of belief in *agwam obwai* as a kind of go-between from the living to the dead, described by Meek, has vanished.

[93] These spring memorial rites are described only imperfectly by Smith, but occur towards the end of the dry season. They begin with *obwai abeyan*, then comes *fon* which seems to be a kind of memorial service for the dead of the preceding year.

[94] Smith lumps together all planting and harvest rituals as *ci* (*chi*) rituals; each of several traditional staples has its own special rites. These rituals appear to define the village, and are presided over by the village *tienwhop*, always a member of an Ankwei clan. (Whether lesser rites are subsequently held by each clan is not clear: Smith never describes the exact functions of the *niewhop*, the clan-head in ritual matters.) Hunting rites are presided over by the *tenci* of each clan: within the village, the rites of the senior clan take precedence over those of all other clans.

[95] Tremearne's (and Temple's) statement that the spirit of a hunter's quarry may be reborn in his child is perhaps relevant here.

2: Gunn E-4 (no date) 1956 FF38 Katab FF38
Kaje

when the deceased *gado* is said to return to the *abwai* hut: beer drinking and dancing take place on alternate days; every spirit voice is heard, and two masked dancers, also described by Reynolds as "dodone," both mute, appear—one, *kusak* (Hausa, *kajinjiri*), who dances with the women of the community, and the other, *daniet*, who parades about at night in a ponderous leaf-covered frame of bamboo. During this entire period, male clothing is restricted to a plaited raphia penis-sheath. Though it has been suggested that neck-cords or *iswandik* are intended to remind women of their marital obligations, and serve to restrain them from contracting new secondary marriages, and though, as has been noted, sexual relations between a man and his brothers' wives is a ritual offence, Reynolds is still of the opinion that *aswa* is a period of sexual licence in the community. At the end of the period of celebration, each wife in the village gives the gathering of cult members a final pot of beer, around the neck of which her *iswandik* is fastened.[132]

769 794 [291] [786]

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The general character of indigenous Kaje religion will be apparent in the above account of rituals and other practices associated with the life cycle. Few additional details are available, and these add little to the picture. 789

When the rains are overdue, the elders of the clan or tribal section meet at the local "rain 'tsafi' place," where the *atiyinhwap* performs a rain-making rite. Failure of this rite in past times brought a league of *atiyinhwap* of Banewhan, Batadon, and Baimbin to "inform" the *atiyinhwap* of Baiduan, who would perform similar rites on behalf of the whole tribe. For a number of years, however, only the *atiyinhwap* of Baimbin has persisted in carrying out these rites.

Acha-sowing rites, too, have fallen into disuse, apparently, except among Baimbin. If a trial sowing of mixed seed of the *atiyinhwap* sprouts satisfactorily, general sowing commences immediately; if not, *atiyinhwap* solicits offerings, presides over a feast of elders, and finally prays over the ground. 241

Acha harvest rites, however, are still commonly practised throughout Kaje, according to Reynolds. These begin much like the rain rites, with the *atiyinhwap* spreading acha paste on the stone at the "rain-shrine": from the rain-shrine, however, he retires to his compound, where he applies paste to the huts, to the floor and walls of his own hut, and finally to his bed. Similar rites are performed in every compound early the next morning, when the compound head selects "a sensible youth who would first spread the paste on an old hoe and then on the grave of his grandfather." Thereafter, huts and cornbins are treated, the nearest cross-roads, and the waterhole; and the head of the compound is given paste to eat, and calls on God and his ancestors to bless them. The youth then eats some of the paste and divides the remainder between members of the compound. Only when these rites are performed can the new acha be used in the regular way as food.

The sanctions against murder, violence between groups or even within the minimal lineage and incest, are traditionally of a supernatural sort, and such crimes might be expunged by ritual purifications: for example, a murderer was expelled to Kagoma, where he served the senior ritual head there as a slave, in effect, for a year; he then retired to Kurmin Bi, where the senior Kaje *atiyinhwap* performed a rite readmitting him to the general Kaje community; he then underwent further rituals in his own village.[133] 681 783

Theft and protracted debt were punished by fines; but the offended and offender were alike subject to oaths and ordeals credited with supernatural sanctions: these were administered by the priests and some are done still. 681 695

[132] On the basis of available materials it is impossible to comment on the apparent discrepancy between Meek's and Reynolds' accounts: Meek understood that this or a nearly identical celebration was recurrent at two- or three-year intervals; cf. Katab, farther above.

[133] Rape and adultery appear to have been left up to the offended party to deal with: the death of the offender ended the matter.